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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 003957

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARPI, NEA/PPD

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KPAQ](#) [PREL](#) [KU](#) [KATRINA](#) [AID](#)

SUBJECT: TFUS01: SPECIAL MEDIA REACTION: KUWAITIS EXTEND UNPRECEDENTED CHORUS OF SUPPORT FOR AID TO KATRINA VICTIMS

Ref: A. 3951

¶11. Summary: Kuwaitis from all sectors of society and across the ideological spectrum have joined in praising the Government of Kuwait's decision to offer \$500 million in aid to Hurricane Katrina victims, and effusive pledges of support covered the front pages of nearly every Kuwaiti newspaper. Kuwaiti Islamists, including Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Abdullah Al-Matoq and Sharia College Dean Dr. Mohammed Al-Tabtabae, offered some of the strongest support for the GOK's offer, a chorus likely designed to offset isolated extreme Islamist voices pronouncing Hurricane Katrina a divine punishment of America. End Summary.

PRAISE FOR THE GOVERNMENT FROM PARLIAMENT

¶12. Acting National Assembly Speaker Abdul Wahab Al-Haroun led a number of MPs in congratulating the GOK for its offer of assistance. "We cannot forget the tremendous role of the United States in standing by us during the invasion of the Saddam Hussein regime of Kuwait," Al-Haroun told Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), the state newswire. "Kuwait's donation to victims of Hurricane Katrina is in line with the international outpouring of help to the American people in their current time of difficulty."

¶13. Other MPs, from across the political spectrum, joined in offering their support. Islamist MP Musallem Al-Barrak, a frequent critic of U.S. policy, told one daily newspaper, "We are deeply moved by what has happened to our ally. We have to help them because they stood by us during our tribulations." Pro-government Islamist MP Ali Al-Hajeri praised the GOK "for doing the right thing," saying to an Arabic daily that, "the United States stood shoulder to shoulder with us during the Iraqi invasion." Moderate MP Issam AL-Dabbous added, "It is our duty to offer help to Americans." Pro-government MPs Mohammed AL-Fajji, Barrak Al-Noun, and Abdullah Al-Fahma also offered public statements in support of the GOK offer.

THE ISLAMIST RESPONSE: "\$500 MILLION IS THE LEAST WE CAN OFFER"

¶14. Perhaps responding to the Ambassador's strongly-worded letter of rebuke to a newspaper which ran a column by an Islamist writer and Ministry of Awqaf official claiming that Hurricane Katrina was a divine punishment of America (reftel), the Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, Abdullah Al-Matoq, told Al-Watan Arabic daily, in a statement carried on the paper's front-page, that "Gloating is not part of Islam and is not Kuwaiti behavior, and \$500 million is the least we can offer to America."

¶15. Other isolated Islamist comments speculating that the hurricane was divine punishment provoked similar rebukes. Responding to such a statement by extreme Islamist and Sharia College professor Hamed Al-Ali, who rejected the GOK's offer of aid to the U.S., Sharia College Dean Dr. Mohammed Al-Tabtabae said, "Islam urges Muslims to help the needy. Reservations regarding these donations are baseless." Islamist lawyer and respected human rights activist Mubarak Al-Mutawa also rejected Al-Ali's statements, and urged Kuwaitis to feel sympathy for the victims of the hurricane. Bader Al-Nashi, the Secretary General of the Islamic Constitutional Movement (Muslim Brotherhood) called on all public and private groups to extend assistance to America, and asked for parliamentary approval of official support.

LIBERALS AND OTHERS REBUKE GLOATING, PLEDGE HELP

¶16. Calls by leading liberal groups and individuals consumed the front page of Arabic daily Al-Qabas. Chair of the National Assembly Foreign Affairs Committee MP Mohammed Al-Safer said that the hurricane "is an occasion for audacity" in assistance. Ahmed Bishara, the Secretary General of the National Democratic movement, called for more support for America. And National Democratic Alliance Secretary General Khalid Al-Mutairi rejected those who opposed sending aid.

ONLINE OFFERS OF ASSISTANCE

17. Kuwaiti bloggers also joined the chorus, rudely rebuking the few Islamists who rejected aid offers from the GOK and calling for support for the hurricane victims. A blogger known as "Kuwaiti Chopper Dude" wrote: "I wished sooo [sic] hard that I could be on a plane to go help these people, but me thousands of miles away with family obligations is not permitting me to do the only humane thing, instead, I did the only thing I could. I donated, and if you have the heart, you would too." Another blogger, known as "Desperately Wandering," wrote: "Tonight I'll pray for [the victims], and for their families because in their frightened faces I see my own family. Should I become a victim of a disaster. an American will be saying a prayer for me too."

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